

## Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3342

EXDIS, FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS  
TAGS: PINT, PEPR, LE  
SUBJ: EXPLANATION OF THE CAUTIOUS POLICY OF THE SARKIS  
GOVERNMENT

1. AT THE END OF OUR CONVERSATION ON JUNE 16, FOREIGN MINISTER BOUTROS MADE AN IMPASSIONED PLEA FOR UNDERSTANDING BY THE USG OF THE INCREDIBLY DIFFICULT POSITION IN WHICH THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON HAS FOUND ITSELF SINCE PRESIDENT SARKIS TOOK OFFICE. HE SAID THAT THE GOL HAD THREE OPTIONS AVAILABLE TO IT: 1) IT COULD HAVE ACTED IN A WAY TO MAKE ITSELF POPULAR IN CHRISTIAN LEBANON BUT THIS MEANT LOSING THE COOPERATION AND SUPPOL OF THE MUSLIM LEBANESE AND ANY HOPE OF INFLUENCE WITH THE PALESTINIANS; 2) IT COULD HAVE TAKEN EXACTLY THE OPPOSITE TACK; OR 3) IT COULD FOLLOW THE POLICY THAT IT HAD IN FACT FOLLOWED AND MAKE NEITHER SIDE HAPPY WHILE RETAINING "THE FRICTION OF A UNITED LEBANON." PEOPLE HAD CRITICIZED GOL FOR NOT TAKING FIRMER ACTION BUT HOW COULD THEY REALLY EXPECT THE LEBANESE GOVERNMENT TO RULE WITH AN IRON HAND USING THE SYRIAN ARMY? THIS WOULD SIMPLY NOT HAVE WORKED. I SAID THAT I THOUGHT PRESIDENT SARKIS HAD MORE SUPPORT THAN HE REALIZED AMONG ALL  
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SECTIONS OF THE LEBANESE POPULATION AND ASKED IF IT WAS NOT POSSIBLE TO BUILD A CONSENSUS OF MODERATE CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS AND AROUND THE PRESIDENT. BOUTROS REPLIED, WHERE WOULD SUCH PEOPLE LIVE? ANY CHRISTIAN WHO IS CONSIDERED SYMPATHETIC TO THE MUSLIMS WOULD BE DRIVEN OUT OF EAST BEIRUT AND CHRISTIAN LEBANON, WHILE ANY MUSLIM WHO COOPERATED WITH THE CHRISTIANS RISKED ATTACK BY PALESTINIAN EXTREMISTS.

2. THE PROBLEM OF MAJOR HADDAD, BOUTROS SAID, WAS ANOTHER EXAMPLE OF THE DILEMMA IN WHICH THE GOL FOUND ITSELF. PRESIDENT SARKIS COULD MAKE HIMSELF EXTREMELY POPULAR WITH THE CHRISTIANS BY APPOINTING MAJOR HADDAD COMMANDER OF THE LEBANESE ARMY FORCES IN THE SOUTH, BUT PRIME MINISTER AL-HOSS HAD THREATENED TO RESIGN IF HE DID SO. ON THE OTHER HAND, SARKIS COULD SUMMARILY DISMISS HADDAD, THUS MAKING HIMSELF VERY POPULAR WITH THE MUSLIMS AND PALESTINIANS, BUT THE RESULT MIGHT BE A REVOLT BY THE CHRISTIANS. TO AVOID THESE TWO EXTREMES, SARKIS WAS TRYING, AS HE HAD FOR THE PAST YEAR AND A HALF, TO STEER A MIDDLE COURSE. THE GOL WANTED TO GET HADDAD OUT IN A WAY THAT WOULD NOT TEAR LEBANON APART. BOUTROS SAID THAT THERE WERE TIMES WHEN IT WAS BETTER TO BE "WISE THAN STRONG" AND THIS WAS ONE OF THEM. IT WAS EASY FOR FOREIGN CRITICS TO URGE THE GOVERNMENT OF LEBANON TO TAKE FORCEFUL ACTION BUT NO ONE SEEMED TO CONSIDER WHAT THE CONSEQUENCES OF THIS ACTION MIGHT BE FOR THE FUTURE OF LEBANON.

3. COMMENT: BOUTROS WAS MORE EMOTIONAL IN THIS PRESENTATION THAN I HAVE EVER SEEN HIM. THE IHDEN MASSACRE OF THE FRANGIEHS HAS GREATLY INCREASED PUBLIC CRITICISM OF THE GOVERNMENT FOR INACTION AND BOUTROS IS CLEARLY FEELING THE STRAIN. THERE ARE CERTAINLY SOME STEPS THE GOL COULD HAVE TAKEN DURING THE LAST 18 MONTHS TO ASSERT ITS PRESENCE MORE FORCEFULLY, BUT THERE IS ALSO CONSIDERABLE VALIDITY IN BOUTROS' COMPLAINT THAT IT

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IS MUCH EASIER TO CRITICIZE THE GOVERNMENT FOR INACTION IF ONE DOES NOT HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE CONSEQUENCES THAT ACTION WILL BRING. THOSE WHO CALL FOR THE GOVERNMENT TO ASSERT ITSELF WANT IT TO DO SO AGAINST THEIR ENEMIES; THEY ARE CERTAIN TO OBJECT VIOLENTLY TO ANY GOL ACTION AGAINST THEIR OWN INTERESTS.

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